



Universiteit
Leiden
Governance and Global Affairs



From Crises to Reshuffles

Shock Absorptive Capacity in Government Cabinets

Bastián González-Bustamante

Leiden University

✉ b.a.gonzalez.bustamante@fgga.leidenuniv.nl

Presentation delivered at the WhoGov Workshop on Political Elites
University of Oslo, Norway, September 1–2, 2025

Introduction

Research Overview

Q **Research question.** Can certain cabinet characteristics help governments absorb shocks without triggering extensive reshuffles?

📊 **PtP + GDLT + World Bank + V-Dem.** Analysis of 92 countries between 1979-2021, mapping over **2.2 million critical events** affecting governments.

📊 **Approach.** Examining whether shocks increase reshuffle risk and if cabinet features moderate this relationship.



Artwork by DALL-E 3 model

Theory



Artwork by DALL-E 3 model

Stochastic events. Crises are high-salience disturbances that compress time, increase uncertainty, and raise the political returns to visible action.

Cabinet reshuffles. Broader realignments of ministers and portfolios that reconfigure the cabinet, distinct from individual terminations.

Shock absorptive capacity. A cabinet's ability to withstand political and organisational pressures generated by a crisis without resulting in extensive reshuffles.

Dimensions of Shock Absorptive Capacity

Expertise

Formal credentials signal general analytical capacity, command over specialised knowledge, and ability to communicate complex issues credibly

Political experience

Stock of procedural knowledge, networks, and reputational assets accumulated before entering the cabinet

Cabinet fragmentation

Alters how executives manage crises by reshaping incentives and control inside the cabinet

Empirical Expectations

Hypotheses

Random Shocks Hypothesis

Realised conflict shocks increase the probability of cabinet reshuffles between $t - 1$ and t

Academic Credentials Hypothesis

Conditional on a realised conflict shock, a higher share of ministers with postgraduate studies attenuates the shock-induced rise in reshuffle risk

Political Experience Hypothesis

Conditional on a realised shock, a higher share of ministers with prior political experience attenuates the shock-induced rise in reshuffle risk

Cabinet Fragmentation Hypothesis

Conditional on a realised shock, greater cabinet fragmentation amplifies the shock-induced rise in reshuffle risk

Methods

Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT)

- Monitors world's news media in 100+ languages
- Historical archives back to January 1979
- Real-time data collection since 2013
- Events measured using **Goldstein scale** (-10 to +10)

Paths to Power (PtP)

- Ministers' educational, occupational, and social backgrounds, etc.
- 141 countries from 1966 to 2021
- Over 45,000 individuals

*Bringing together PtP, GDELT, World Bank data, and V-Dem, and applying the **democracy filter**, yields a temporal window (1979-2021) that covers 92 countries and more than 2.2M random shocks.

Operationalisation

- **Major reshuffle.** More than two officeholders and portfolios affected within a one-year timeframe. PtP offers annual snapshots; the classic definition is within a month.
- **Shocks.** Log-intensity shocks measure of conflict-oriented events (Goldstein scale –10 to –4). For example, –4 and –5 imply protests and demonstrations, –7 a break in diplomatic relations, and –10 a military attack or coup.
- **Moderators.** Proportion of ministers with postgraduate degrees, prior political experience, and cabinet fragmentation.
- **Controls.** Presidentialism, average age of ministers, proportion of women, GDP growth, and inflation.

Identification Strategy

- Within-country variation with country and year fixed effects
- Lags to ensure temporal ordering.

Placebo Models

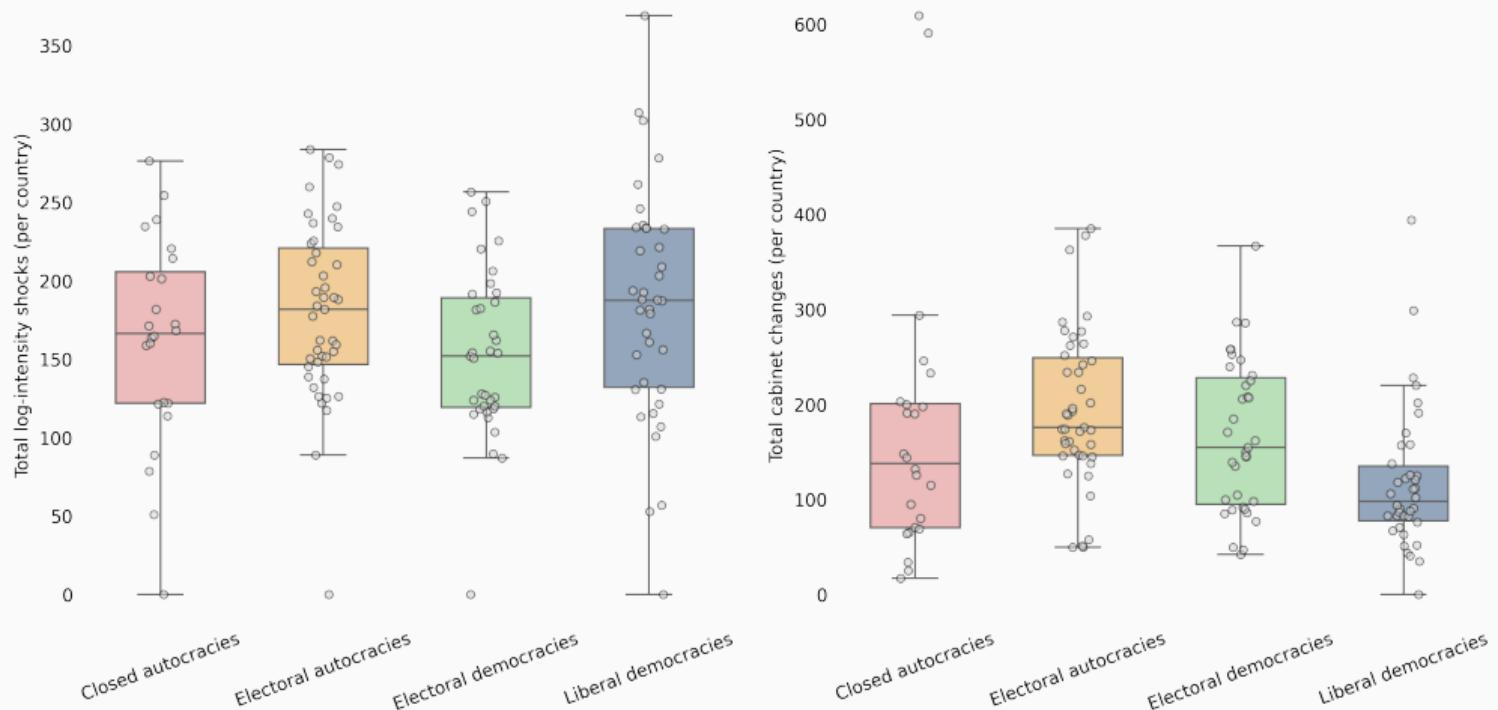
- Placebo tests replacing shock in $t - 1$ with shock in $t - 2$.

Robustness Checks

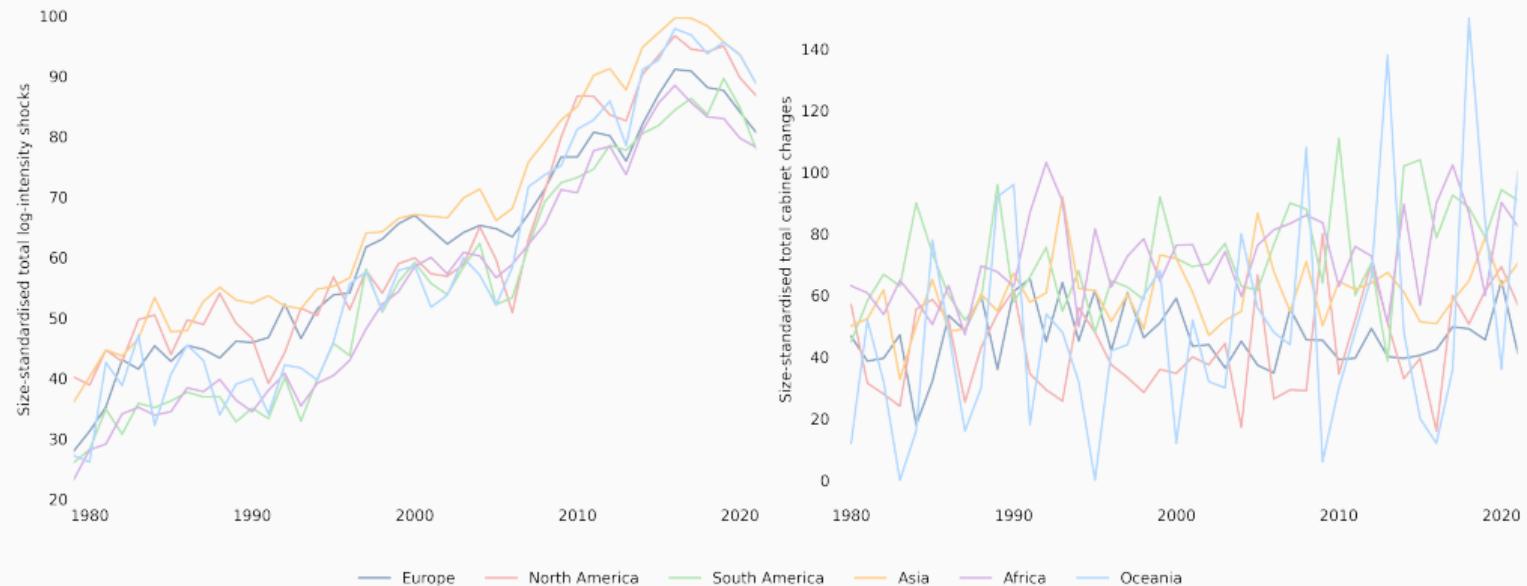
- Unsaturated interaction estimates
- Proportion of turnover with OLS
- Proportion of PhDs
- Log inflation

Results

Trends in Shocks and Cabinet Turnover



Regional Trends Over Time



Evolution of Cabinet Composition

The data shows several trends in cabinet composition over time (*a number of plots are available in the full paper*):

- Proportion of ministers with **postgraduate degrees increases** almost monotonically across regions.
 - Share of ministers with **prior political officeholding** edges higher in Europe and Oceania.
 - **Cabinet fragmentation** increases slowly.
 - Fraction of **women in cabinets trends upwards**, reaching around 25% by the end of the period (except in Asia).
- * These trends indicate a long-term professionalisation of cabinets and progressive inclusion of women.

Models of Random Shocks on Reshuffles

	Major Reshuffle					
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI
Log-intensity shocks	0.316*** (0.095)	0.315*** (0.095)	0.336*** (0.100)	0.416*** (0.136)	0.250* (0.148)	0.355*** (0.107)
Prop. of postgraduates		-0.062 (0.504)	-0.155 (0.525)	0.431 (0.835)	-0.115 (0.527)	-0.151 (0.525)
Prop. of political experience		0.730 (0.515)	0.453 (0.544)	0.498 (0.545)	-0.073 (0.852)	0.467 (0.544)
Cabinet fragmentation		0.237 (0.330)	0.085 (0.346)	0.085 (0.346)	0.069 (0.347)	0.421 (0.714)
Shocks × postgraduates				-0.136 (0.156)		
Shocks × experience					0.116 (0.144)	
Shocks × fragmentation						-0.074 (0.138)
Constant	0.248 (0.777)	-0.215 (0.891)	-0.743 (1.400)	-1.211 (1.500)	-0.479 (1.436)	-0.800 (1.402)
Estimation method	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM

Controls and tests were omitted due to space constraints, available in the full paper

Effects of Random Shocks on Reshuffles

The effect of shocks is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.336$, 95% CI [0.147, 0.527], $p \leq 0.001$), confirming the **Random Shocks Hypothesis**.

First Shock

Increases reshuffle probability by 3.4%. From baseline of 19.3% to 22.8%

Subsequent Shocks

Progressively smaller effects due to logarithmic intensity. Second shock: +2.0%, third shock: +1.7%

Cumulative Impact

By the fourth shock, likelihood of major reshuffle exceeds 40%. With median number of shocks ($n = 97$), probability reaches 75.7%.

Placebo (Robustness Checks also Yielded Consistent Results)

	Major Reshuffle					
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI
Log-intensity shocks placebo ($t - 2$)	0.152*	0.155*	0.106	0.103	0.074	0.119
	(0.092)	(0.093)	(0.095)	(0.133)	(0.141)	(0.101)
Prop. of postgraduates		-0.178	-0.262	-0.283	-0.249	-0.257
		(0.504)	(0.525)	(0.853)	(0.527)	(0.525)
Prop. of political experience		0.643	0.424	0.422	0.221	0.432
		(0.522)	(0.554)	(0.555)	(0.865)	(0.553)
Cabinet fragmentation		0.307	0.190	0.190	0.184	0.489
		(0.335)	(0.350)	(0.351)	(0.351)	(0.746)
Shocks \times postgraduates				0.005		
				(0.157)		
Shocks \times experience					0.044	
					(0.144)	
Shocks \times fragmentation						-0.065
						(0.143)
Constant	0.482	0.098	-0.792	-0.775	-0.690	-0.839
	(0.808)	(0.937)	(1.453)	(1.556)	(1.494)	(1.456)
Estimation method	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM	GLM

Controls and tests were omitted due to space constraints, available in the full paper.

Discussion

Why No Absorptive Capacity?

Rejected Hypotheses

The absence of significant interactions suggests that none of these moderators provides governments with the ability to absorb shocks and prevent major cabinet reshuffles.

- **Crude measurement of expertise.** Degree level is a rough proxy for crisis-relevant capacity and may not capture domain-specific expertise needed for particular types of shocks.
- **Limited value of experience.** Prior officeholding may offer less marginal advantage when strong crises hit governments.
- **Incomplete fragmentation measure.** Party count may not capture underlying bargaining logics related to internal factions or informal groups.

Takeaways

0.2%

**Increased Risk
per Event**

Each additional shock increases the probability of a major reshuffle by on average 0.2%

22.8%

**First Shock
Impact**

The first shock raises the predicted probability of a major reshuffle from a typical baseline of 19.3% to 22.8%

75.7%

**Cumulative
Effect**

Combining baseline risk with the median number of shocks, the predicted probability reaches 75.7%

Cabinet composition features did not significantly moderate the shock-reshuffle relationship

Future Directions

- **Classify shocks by policy domain.** Categorising events by policy area may reveal moderation not accounted for when using pooled shocks. Financial shocks may interact with economic expertise, while health crises may require different skills.
- **Develop field-specific expertise indicators.** Move beyond degree level to map ministers' backgrounds to domain-specific skills. Match expertise to the type of crisis for more precise measurement of absorptive capacity.
- **Double-check temporal mismatch.** PtP provides annual snapshots, while shocks unfold within the year. Despite data preprocessing and lags, residual timing noise cannot be entirely eliminated.
- **Selection in observational data.** While specification safeguards help, causal inference remains challenging. Future work should complement this design with stronger causal approaches when feasible.

Thank you very much!

Do you have any questions?

b.a.gonzalez.bustamante@fgga.leidenuniv.nl

bgonzalezbustamante.com